PLATE XLVIII

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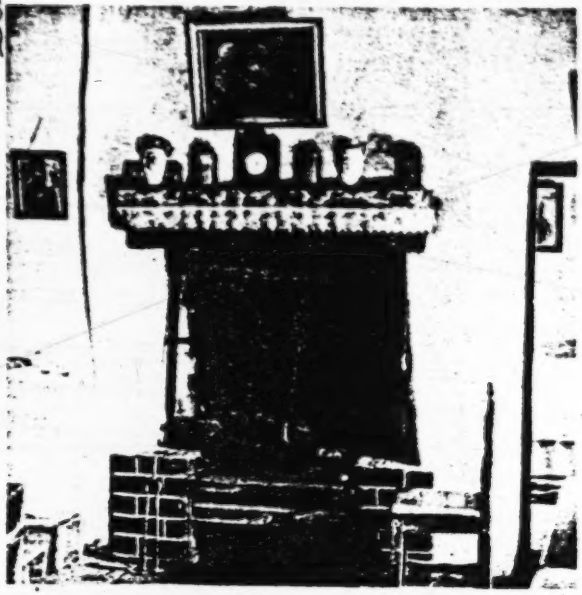

1.

1. Fire-place with iron-grate. Glencolumbkille, Co. Donegal.

2. The basket hanging to dry on the southwall of the house. Lough Eske, Co. Donegal.

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[p.220]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Fig. 16. Co. Mayo.

Fig. 17. N. Ireland.

The evening milking was often followed by dancing to the music of an itinerant piper, and there were many diversions for the cattle-tenders through the long summer days. Old tales and songs were kept alive among the hills where many of them had their origin. Spinning and knitting occupied the women, and the youngsters amused themselves by cutting and carving wooden objects and by making toys out of rushes—rattles (Fig. 16), cages for butterflies (Fig. 17), dainty rush baskets for gathering "fruogs" (bilberries) (Fig. 18) and ornamental whips and sticks of bound rushes. Little wicker cages were made for catching birds. Various instruments and whistles for calling together the animals were constructed, and there have been discovered deep in the bogs long horns which curiously resemble those still used by the Carpathian shepherds. I have read that in the Scottish Highlands that ancient ceremonial instrument, the bull-roarer (Fig. 113) played a part in the cattle herding. We shall refer to its survival in Ireland in Chapter 19. As in modern Norway, it might be said that "the time spent in the mountain pastures was the happiest time of the year. Every living creature wanted to go to the mountains."

Although this booleying, like the rundale village system which it accompanied and helps to explain, is now almost entirely a thing of the past, it has left many traces in the customs and traditions of the countryside. Hill pastures, now devoted mostly to sheep-rearing and visited only by the shepherd, are still held in common and reckoned in sums, lumps or collops, the unit of mountain grazing which fixes the relative grazing capacity of different kinds of stock. Thus a cow may be reckoned equal to four yearlings, five goats or sheep or say twenty geese. The decline of seasonal nomadism affected the balance of rural life and work and left a summer surplus of young folk who were free to emigrate or to engage in harvesting whether in the east of Ireland or later in Britain, while frequently the women became vagrants during the summer. In Ulster, where the incoming "planters" were bitterly opposed to the "creaghts," as the transhumants were called, the custom explains the ease with which, throughout

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the 17th century, the natives withdrew themselves to the mountains, where they lived a life that some historians have mistaken for aboriginal nomadism. 221

The booleying tradition, finally, throws light on many of the customs connected with cattle and sheep, and helps to explain the absence of the dairy in permanent dwellings which formerly had to serve as winter houses only, most of the dairy work being done in summer. It also helps us to attribute to custom rather than solely to laziness and neglect the Irish farmer's traditional indifference to the fate of his crops during the summer months. "Spring and harvest time," we quote a typical 19th century observer, "are the only periods at which the peasants exert themselves, and then they work very hard; for the rest of the year they are idle."

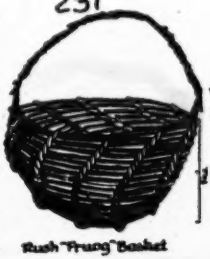

Fig. 18. Co. Antrim.

The old customs of tending ("herding") the cattle and tethering or spancelling them also derive from the rundale phase with its lack of field-divisions and fences. "Cattle, sheep, pigs and goats," wrote Arthur Young, "are all in bondage, their forelegs tied together with straw .... cocks, hens, turkeys and geese all have their legs in thraldom." Various devices for limiting the freedom of farm animals are still widely used: even the hen with her chickens around her will be seen tethered by the leg to a stone or iron weight. Where animals still run in common under the system of "sums" it is necessary to give them distinguishing marks. Apart from the well-known methods of branding or colouring the sheep's wool it is the custom in parts of Ireland, as in Wales, to ear-mark sheep by cutting or notching the ear with proprietary shapes. In Clare Island the geese are "tokened" by having holes punched in their webbed feet. Incidentally it is worth noticing that, so far as I am aware, the iron-tipped shepherd's crook is unknown in Ireland, a bent ash stick taking its place. "Gatherings" and co-operation are of course a feature of sheep-shearing and dipping. Sheep-pens of dry stone construction are often associated with ancient settlements among the hills: they are of various shapes and would repay study.

[p. 56 is blank]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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243 survivals, associated with the cutting of the last sheaf—the "churn" or the "Cailleach" (Chapter 19).

Corn stacks are more varied in shape than haystacks and need better protection from weather and from vermin. [824] Sprigs of apple-mint (*M. arvensis*) may be thrown through the sheaves to keep away mice. The stone stack-stands or staddels, called "hovels," are a picturesque feature of the stackyard in some districts. With their steep tops rising above the house clusters, the golden corn stacks turn the little Irish villages into African kraals, or in the fields one may count as many as 30 round stacks in a row, rising against the sky up the hillside. Then the whole countryside seems fuller than usual. New colours and odours meet one on all sides, and the horses as they pass give off the sharp smell which comes from crunching the fresh oats. The country smiths used to make a small light fork or "pike," fitted with a long handle, for throwing the last sheaves high up (Fig. 66). The stacks are thatched with rushes, twisted into bundles known as "stapples" which are pushed into the straw.

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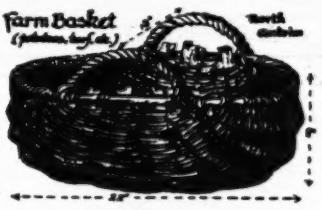

Fig. 54.

241 We cannot touch on the methods of harvesting and stacking the other cereal crops, wheat, barley and rye, but a word must be said in conclusion on the last harvest of the year—the root crops. Although turnips and the new sugar beet are important in some areas, it is the potato crop which means most to the peasant. All available hands are in the fields, gathering the precious food-supply into wicker baskets or boxes (Figs. 54 and 55); and the school children are given

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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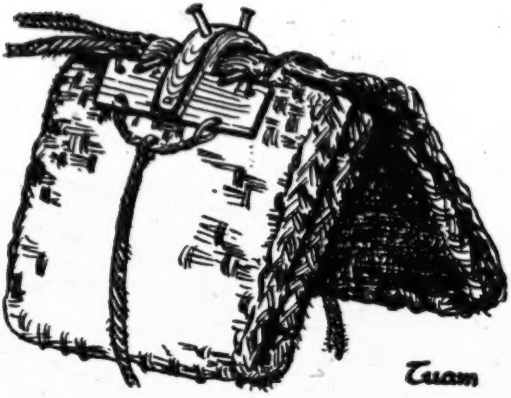

Straw pads & straddle for Creels

Fig. 57.

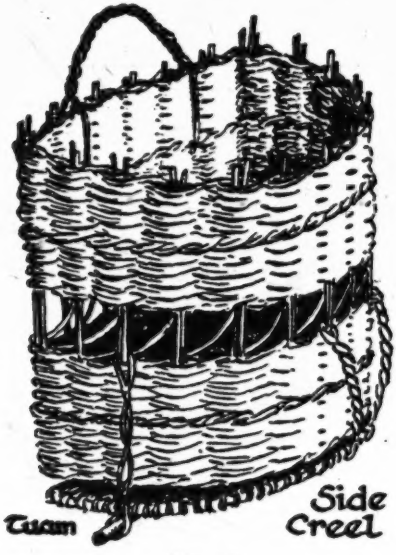

Fig. 58.

[p. 107]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Aran Islands

Plate V.

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MAKING A SKIB
INISHERE, ARAN
CREEL IN GROUND BEHIND

[facing p. 121]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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281 415 across, are commonly arranged in patterns having, for example, the maker's initials and the date left unpierced. A deeper tray used for carrying corn or for fruit-picking is known as a "dallan." Then there is the meal sieve, which has fine perforations, for sifting the coarse skins (meal seeds) from the oatmeal. Similar to this is the buttermilk sieve with which, 285 415 before the adoption of the hair sieve, the small particles of butter were strained from the buttermilk. A milk-strainer made of birch bark folded into a cone and filled with straw is referred to in a 17th century account quoted by Mr. E. MacLysaght. In Tory, according to Mr. T. Mason, the wight is "composed simply of sheepskin with a twisted straw rope forming the rim."

The corn sieve, for getting out dust and dirt, and the corn riddle (Fig. 71), for separating bits of straw and "hairy

[281]

Fig. 71.

tails," consist of interwoven splits of ash or bog-fir attached to a rim of the same material. The only difference between them is that the mesh of the former is one-eighth of an inch, of the latter perhaps ¼ inch, though it may vary for different kinds of grain. Efficient riddling is a difficult and nowadays rather rare art. I have not come across sieves of rushes or split willow, but it is very likely that they may be found.

243 412 The corn riddle and the winnowing tray lead us back to the thrashing floor in the barn. Here we will probably see a flail hanging on the wall. The sound of the flail is by no means rare in Ireland, for in outlying districts the small farmer has no other means of thrashing. The three parts of the flail are the helve or "hand-stave," a straight stick of any light wood such as ash or larch, the shorter and heavier swingel or beater, called in Ireland the "souple" (generally made of hazel, occasionally of holly or birch) and the flail-joint, hanging or [284] "mid-kipple," which may be a sheep- or goat-skin thong, a

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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length of flax, or an eel skin. The methods of attaching the hanging to the hand-stave and souple vary, as will be seen from a random selection of drawings (Fig. 72). The joint [284]

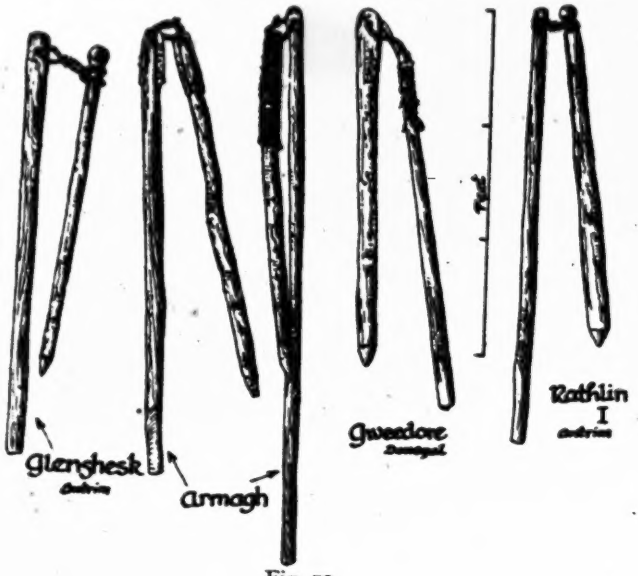

Fig. 72.

shown in the Armagh flail (left), resembles a common English style, but it occurs as far west as Galway. Varied too, are the proportions between the component parts and the methods of swinging the flail. Thus in Antrim the souple is flung round the head while in Donegal it is kept to the side of the body. On fine days the thrashing may take place out of doors, but the usual place is " between doors " in the barn or even in the kitchen, for the opposite doors create a draught which carries away the dust. A besom of heather or of dried kale flower-stalks keeps the barn floor clean. [824]

One of the most interesting and varied and probably one of the oldest crafts practised by countryfolk is the making of 285

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

285 baskets, and of creels and other objects of wickerwork. To do the subject justice would require a large volume, and we must confine ourselves to some broad aspects. We have referred to creels and kishes of various kinds in Chapter 12. These are objects which the countryman makes for himself, as distinct from the "fancy" basket work which is generally in the hands of special families. To take the creels first, they are constructed bottom-upwards in the same way as the framework of the Boyne curragh, by sticking the stout standards in the earth as though to make wattles and bending them over [824] to form the foundation of the bottom. Strong black sally, hazel or rowan are employed instead of the soft basket willows. The standards are left projecting above the rim of the creel when it is finished, so that the sides do not lift off. But a well woven "mouth" is also necessary to prevent slipping: it may be made single or double. Both creels and kishes may have windows in the sides (Chapter 12 and Fig. 58), an ornamental feature also found in the old wicker cradles. Creels and kishes may be loosely or tightly woven according to whether they are intended for turf or manure. Openwork creels are made in Co. Antrim by pegging the side rods into the two corner standards at intervals of about 4 inches. The old custom in Donegal is to repair two old creels and make two new ones each year. (*See Plate V.*)

285 227 Lobster-pots (Chapter 16), stock-pots, fruit and fish hampers, are made on a perforated wooden frame which may be regarded as a substitute for the earth, but most of the

[283]

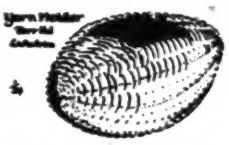

Fig. 73. Length 19".

285 "fancy work" is undertaken by specialized basket makers, and we can do no more than indicate the variety and skill of their products. There are certain localities where the tradition of basket-making is strong, for instance the shores of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Lough Neagh—incidentally one of the oldest occupied areas in the country—the valley of the Suir and the Aran Islands. I illustrate a boat-shaped yarn-holder (Fig. 73) and also two types of " calf basket " (Fig. 74), which are tied over the calf's muzzle to prevent it from taking the cow's milk. (In north Antrim, as in Wales, I have seen instead a leather strap armed with nails which is fastened on in such a way that the nails prick the cow's udder). The calf basket recalls the Roman *corbis constricta* which prevented the plough oxen from cropping the vine shoots. In fine work the basket maker uses split rods which he prepares with a " cleaver." The example illustrated (Fig. 75) is made of cow's horn.

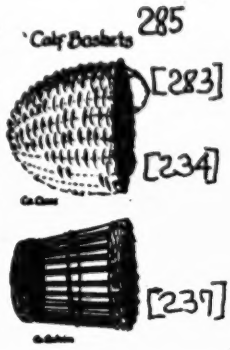

Fig. 74.

Fig. 75.

Then there are the shallow fish baskets, resembling the potato-dish shown in Fig. 31, which the Galway fisherwomen carry on their heads. In Limerick oval trays or " floats " are used for hawking shell-fish or fruit: they are of various sizes from 1 to 2 feet in length. Potato baskets (Fig. 54) and shallow baskets used in connection with wool-dyeing must be mentioned, and I illustrate two kinds of linebasket (Fig. 76) which, like the lobster pots (Fig. 104) are made by the fishermen. The tall apple-baskets used for picking fruit in the Armagh orchards taper down to a narrow base. On the other hand the deep carrying-baskets of the Aran Islands are shaped

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Line Baskets

Fig. 76. Length *c.* 3 ft.

into a narrow mouth, a feature which is found in all Aran basket-work. Miss Gahan of the Irish Homespun Society regards it as an adaptation to the conditions on the islands, for the contents might easily be spilled owing to the number of loose stone walls which have to be crossed on a journey to the fields. Many of the Aran carrying baskets (" kishauns ") are constructed of coiled straw rope bound together with split bramble (Fig. 77). They no doubt help to keep warm the food carried in them, such as boiled potatoes, boiled in their skins needless to say, in the Irish fashion. Such " lipe-work " was once common in Wales, where seed-baskets, yarn-holders, hassocks and meal containers were made in this way, but in Ireland the only coiled work I have seen outside the Aran Islands is the bee-skep of rye straw, tied with bramble. The illustration shows the small bone pin or awl used by the islanders in threading the brambles. Similar pins, which doubtless had many uses, are frequently found in archæological excavations, particularly on sites where a Mesolithic heritage may be suspected.

[282]

[231]

Coiled Straw Basket

Fig. 77.
Note bone pin.

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Fig. 77a.
Height 4 ft.

This brings us to the very large topic of the uses made of straw. There is no need to refer to the value of oat straw as fodder or as thatch, though it does not last long as roofing material, and either wheat or rye straw is preferred. A humble example of the use of thatch is shown in the beehive (Fig. 77*a*) Rope (sugán) made of straw or hay still finds many uses, especially for tying down thatch on houses and stacks. It is twisted on a " thraw-hook " of ash or hazel, with a sally hand-grip, but the old styles are declining with the spread of a simple " twister " of strong bent wire (Fig. 78). This type is found throughout the British Isles in many forms some of which are

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known to be of mediæval descent. The method of manufacture is shown in Fig. 50, and the tying down of a hay pike in Fig. 51. Sugán was sometimes employed instead of wattle

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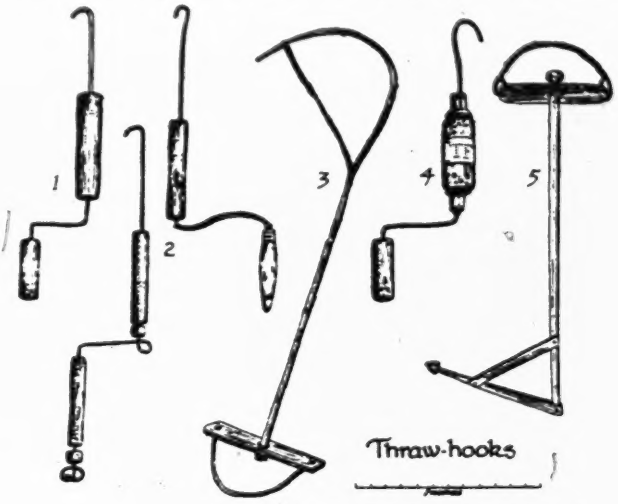

[413]

Fig. 78.

Sugán twisters 1. Co. Antrim. 2. Both Donegal. 3. Lecale, Down. 4. Leitrim. 5. Dingle, Kerry.

in the chimney canopies. It was used for the seats of chairs and for the clothes-line which stretched across the kitchen. A short length was sometimes worn as a girdle around a child's dress. From it were made tethering ropes, spancels and langles, traces and tail-ropes; and on the Donegal seaboard I have heard of cabbages being tethered "against the wind" by three hay-ropes! It is on record that the men of Mayo would descend the seacliffs suspended by a straw-rope.

A length of sugán is also the foundation course of many more complex objects of straw such as mats, mattresses, screens, beehives, nesting boxes, stools, arm-chairs, baskets and hampers. I illustrate (Fig. 79) one of the conical hen-nests which are hung on pegs in the kitchen: large

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Fig. 79.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Fig. 80.

Fig. 81.

rectangular examples containing four nest-holes in two storeys are found in some districts, for example in Co. Longford. Though not easy to describe, the construction is quite simple once a start has been made. The finished objects have the appearance of being coiled. While some may have been made in this way, any that I have examined or watched under construction are plaited. The first stage is to twist a long sugán and double it into a two-ply rope, inserting between each third twist a small handful of straw known as a "tate." For the second row the tates are folded forward and plaited, the third rope being provided by the combined ends of the last tate. Handfuls of straw are inserted at regular intervals during the process, and the plaiting goes on until the desired shape and size are reached. The effect is shown in the hen-nest (Fig. 79). Straw collars for horses are made in a different way: some consist of two-ply ropes sown together with twine, but the type used with the Glens' slide-car is simpler (Plate IV).

Ropes of many kinds were in steady demand for tethering and spancelling, and it was the custom to prepare a good supply during the winter. Rushes were also used for the purpose, and they still meet a number of other needs such as bedding, thatching and flax-tying, apart from their old uses for toys, baskets, floor beds, rushlights and the ceremonial crosses to be discussed in Chapter 17. For making ropes the rushes were cut in late summer and beetled with a maul (or "mell"), then broken and twisted by hand so as to get rid of the pith. Dried in the sun and tied in bundles, they were stored until the dark days of winter, when they were fashioned into burden ropes and binnen-ropes (Chapters 9 & 12). The rushes were twisted by hand, first as single ropes, then in two ply: finally an eye was made at one end, and this end was strengthened by threading through another length of rope so as to make a plait. Spancels of rush rope were used to tie together the front legs of kicking cows, and horses were prevented from straying at nights by similar treatment. "Langles" and "burochs," tying together the side and the hind legs respectively, were other methods of hobbling. Straw ropes were commonly employed instead of rush ropes for hobbling,

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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3/4 the fuel is built differ from one area to another, and I give as a sample the list prepared by Mr. J. M. Mogey for Co. Antrim. After about a fortnight the spread turf is stacked in small "foots" formed by leaning a number of turves together, and later in "turn-foots" and "castles" which are built up in storeys. These are then combined into larger "rickles" or

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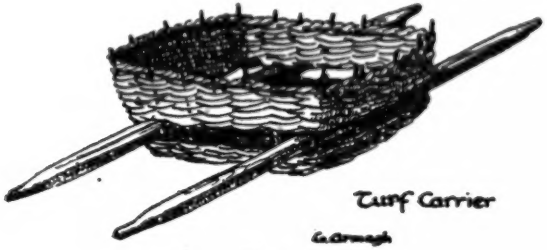

Fig. 91.

"clamps" and finally stored in "hand-stacks" erected alongside a bog road or in larger stacks built at the homestead (Fig. 93).

[413]

Fig. 92.

In many parts of the country the low-lying bogs are too wet to cut with the spade, and other methods of "winning" the turf must be adopted. Making "hand-turf" by moulding or "kneading" the black mud into balls is the simplest solution of the problem, but systematic methods have been evolved in some districts, and we give an account of the process as observed in Co. Meath, where mud turf is highly prized and considered to burn better and last longer than cut peat. It is dug in pits, broken down with short-handled shovels and graips and well mixed with water until the slushy mixture is ready to shovel into a box barrow, that is an ordinary manure barrow or a turf barrow fitted with sides, It is wheeled on to a smooth place and spread in a layer some 9 inches thick. When dry enough to take a man's weight the layer is notched in deep parallel grooves made with the edges of the hands, with cross grooves at intervals. The worker

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER XVII

FESTIVALS AND FAIRS: THE COUNTRY TOWN.

Although the Celtic year began with All Hallows Day (November 1st), for our purpose we may regard it as starting on February 1st, or St. Bridget's Day. This was the first day of Spring, and of field work, for the Saint promised that every second day thereafter would be hard and dry. The circle of the year ran its course through the seasons, punctuated by certain fixed festivals and by the uncertain advent of births, marriages, illness and death. It is with the fixed festivals that we are concerned in this chapter. The four seasons have their opening days on the first of February, May, August and November, and the celebration of these days and the preceding Eves is a pagan survival breaking through the Christian calendar. The festivals of February and of November have been taken under the special protection of the Church through their association with St. Bridget and All Saints, but many traces of the "elder faiths" of nature worship live on, sanctified by tradition if not always by the Church.

On St. Bridget's Eve (January 31st) it is customary for country children to pull rushes—they must not be cut with a knife—and take them home to be made into crosses by the family gathered round the fire. A fixed ritual, varying from one district to another, determines the procedure, and it traditionally included the St. Bridget's supper of pancakes or sowens taken from a plate laid on top of a rush cross. The

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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crosses, of various patterns, are hung up over doors and beds and in the byre to bring good luck. Some of them are very elaborate, but the oldest style, to judge from its Celtic form, is the three-legged cross (Fig. 106) which is specially associated with cattle and is not, like the other shapes, taken to church to be blessed, a ceremony which is kept up even in parts of Belfast. In the Glens of Antrim a small bed is fashioned out of rushes and placed by the fire on St. Bridget's Eve: the door is left unlatched so that the Saint may come in and rest.

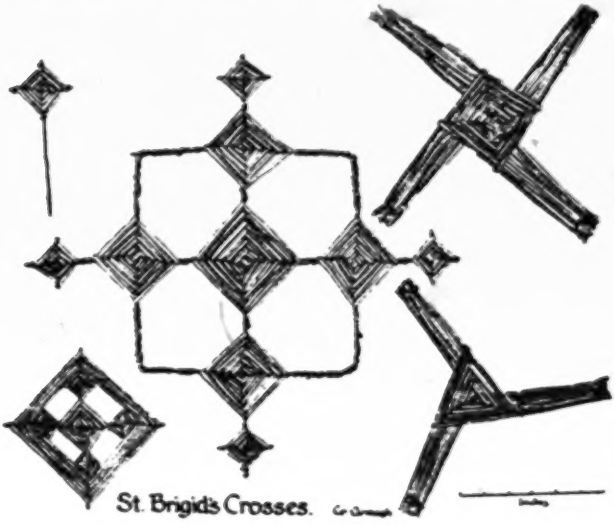

Fig. 106.

In Co. Kerry young lads called "Biddy Boys" wear hats of straw on the first of February, and in other parts of the west, I am told, "Bridget Belts" of plaited straw are worn.

. The next important day in the calendar comes about the middle of the three months of Spring, that is at the time now kept as a national holiday in North and South alike—St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. This is regarded as the proper time to commence sowing, and the countryman counts on

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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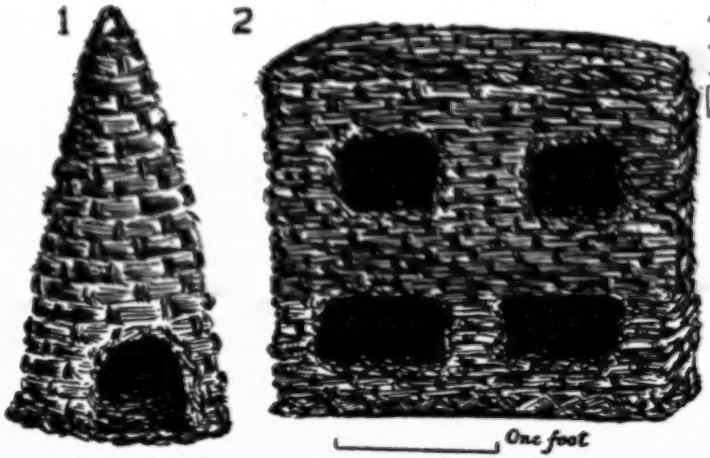

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FIG. 16. Straw hens' nests. (1) Co. Clare. (2) Co. Leitrim.

hen warmly ensconced in a stone-box alongside the fire. In the mud floor one may sometimes see large 'pot-holes', hollows in which the heavy iron pot is placed when the boiled potatoes are pounded for pig-food (Fig. 19). The wooden or iron 'beetles' with which the pounding is done are as varied in shape and size as they are indispensable (Fig. 17). Sometimes

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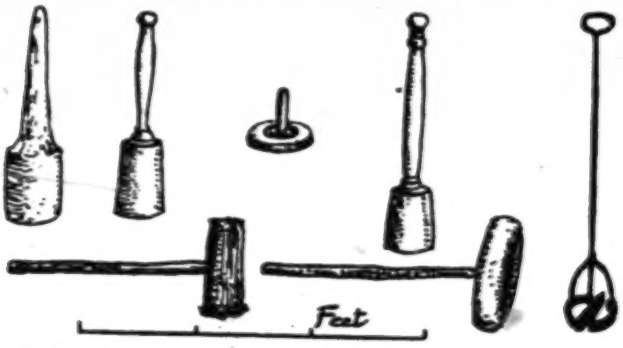

FIG. 17. Beetles, for pounding potatoes and, below, mells for 'knocking whins', Co. Antrim. Beetles similar to the first example were formerly used also for washing clothes and for breaking flax before hand-scutching.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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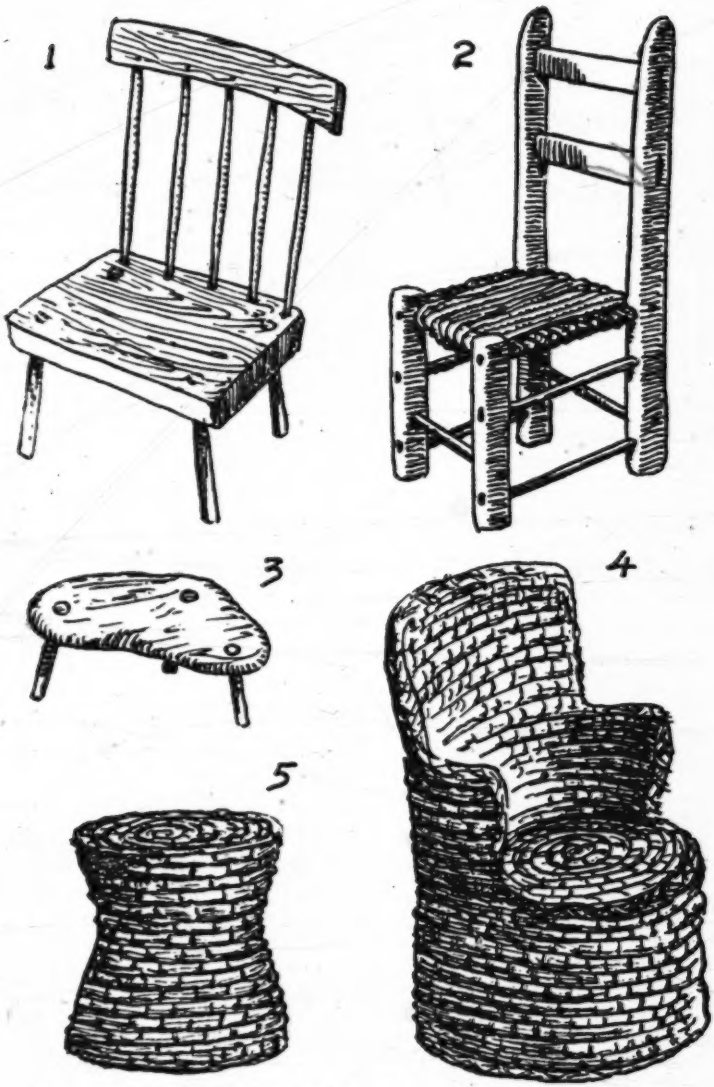

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FIG. 29. (1) Co. Antrim chair. (2) Co. Down straw-seated chair. (3) Creepie. (4) Armchair of coiled straw-rope, Co. Cork. (5) Straw seat, Co. Clare.

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County Antrim

PLATE 8

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1. Slide-car with peat-kish. Glens of Antrim.

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2. Wheel-car, Glens of Antrim.

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283 of these rope-making materials had other uses as well, not forgetting their functions in ceremony and magic as represented by Briget's crosses, harvest knots, the blaeberry baskets of Lammas and the rush ladders of Hallowe'en. Better known, [373] though no longer made, are the rushlights whose feeble glow, in the words of Gilbert White, made 'darkness visible'.

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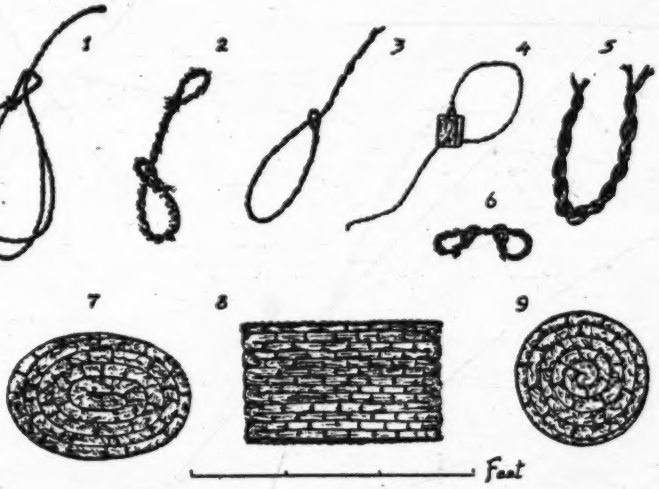

FIG. 68. Ropes and mats. (1) Rush burden rope, Co. Donegal. (2) Tie of cow-hair, Co. Kerry. (3) Willow bark burden rope, Co. Roscommon. (4) Grass burden rope, Aran Islands. (5) Tie of fir-rope, from roof, Co. Down. (6) Sheep's langle of oat straw, Co. Down. (7) Plaited mat of marram grass, Co. Wexford. (8) Coiled mat of rye straw, Aran Islands. (9) Coiled mat of oat straw, Co. Donegal.

283 Examples of ropes and mats of various kinds are shown in Fig. 68. The burden ropes, carefully made in two or three ply, 482 enabled quite heavy loads to be carried from inaccessible places. A correspondent in Co. Cork has sent me the following account of one method of lifting the burden, in this case of furze (gorse, whin) which was harvested both for bedding and for fodder. 'Passing his rope round the bundle, the carrier would throw himself on his back on top of the bundle, kick his heels in the air and jerk himself to the vertical, walking away completely concealed beneath a moving mountain of furze.' Where tracks

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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were poor and there were no wheeled vehicles, or where there was no horse for a slide-car, the burden rope was all that was required to carry home the harvest; distances were mercifully small on the tiny farms. Rushes for rope making were cut when fully grown, beetled with a mell and broken by hand to rid them of pith. They were then spread to dry and afterwards tied in bundles ready to be fashioned into ropes when wintry weather brought indoor leisure. Ropes made of cowhair as well as horsehair, sometimes mixed with seasoned sedge (sprit) once found many uses about the farm. Horsehair fishing lines and snares for seabirds are described elsewhere, but we may refer here to snares for small birds which in south Armagh, for example, are laid on the grass in hard wintry weather over a scattering of grain or breadcrumbs. Inside the frame of a pegged string or a bent sally rod are tied a dozen or more snares made of single or double horsehair. By this means blackbirds, thrushes, sparrows, and finches are caught by the feet, nowadays for sport but, no doubt, once as a welcome addition to the food supply. Similar horsehair snares for catching small birds are known from England and, further afield, from the Sudan. Reins of horsehair are said to have been common quite recently in Donegal, and I would hazard a guess that horsehair nets, such as were made in Harris (Martin Martin tells us) for catching seals, were formerly made there.

Mats and baskets of many kinds were fashioned from straw and other materials such as marram grass. This tough grass is harvested in places all around the coast and put to many uses, including thatching. It is cut below the surface of the sandy dunes, and in Donegal I have seen a toothed sickle used for the purpose. The techniques of constructing mats and baskets of these materials are closely related and seem to fall into three classes, sown plaits, built-up plaits and coiled work. Coiled basketry is best represented in the once universal bee-skep, in the seed-baskets of the south, the seats and armchairs of the west, and in the food-carrying baskets of the Aran Islands (Fig. 69). It is an interesting detail of their construction that a bone pin is used to insert the ties, which are usually made of split briar. The conical hens' nests hung on pegs on the kitchen walls (Fig. 16) are also constructed in a coil technique, but

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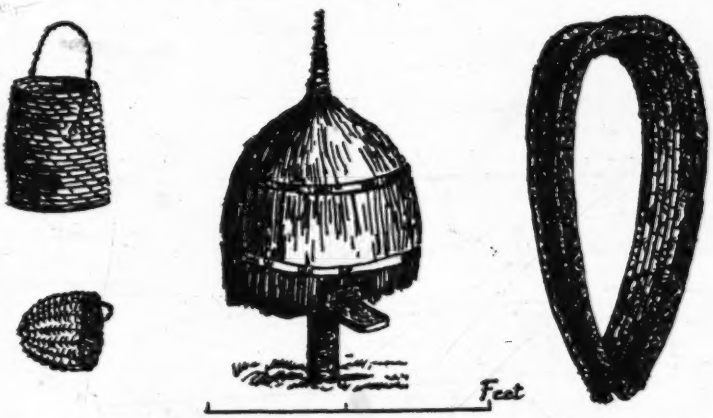

FIG. 69. Coiled food-basket, Aran Islands; calf muzzle, Co. Clare; beehive and horse-collar, Co. Antrim; all of straw except the calf muzzle.

some large rectangular examples seem to be made of built-up plait as described below. The distribution of coiled basketry in western Europe suggests that it is an extension northwards from south European and African regions where it is a richly developed art. A straw underthatch from Co. Down—the only one of its kind I have seen in the north—was made in a simple weaving technique, using straw ropes. But the commonest method of making mats was by what I have called built-up plaiting; beginning with a straw rope twisted on itself, wisps of straw are inserted in every third twist and their ends worked into plait in combination with the combined ends of the previous wisp. Fresh handfuls of straw are regularly inserted into the plaits. They are given different names in various parts of the country; for example, tates in Antrim, kets in Down, and gleogs in Meath.

Such mats can be made of any desired size, and in the past they served many purposes, as hangings to mark off bedrooms or bed alcoves, as linings for the wattled doors of houses, and as mattresses. Their long-continued use with wattled doors on houses of mud or stone carries the suggestion that wattled [342] houses of the better class may once have been lined with straw mats serving as draught screens and taking the place of the

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hanging skins, carpets or tapestries of other cultures. Today the most familiar use of the plaited mats is as creel mats on the backs of asses (Fig. 56). When creels are dispensed with and the load is placed directly on the ass a simple 'sugan' is sometimes made—a ring of straw some fifteen inches in diameter bound with a fine straw rope. This is a variant of the head-wreath once widely worn in western Europe as a carrying pad. Straw collars—made entirely of straw and not merely straw-stuffed—have so recently gone out of use that I have seen several decayed specimens on hill farms in the north, and the art of making them is not forgotten. In their construction several oval rings of three-strand straw plait are stitched together (Fig. 69). Unlike the ordinary Irish horse collar, they are, of course, not made to open; they were carefully shaped to hold flattish wooden hames.

Many varieties of baskets of straw rushes and other pliant materials which were once made in the homes are now known only by name: for example, the puckan of built-up plaiting which held seed potatoes in Co. Down, or, hung in the stable, served as a nest for pigeons. They had short lives, and few specimens have survived, so that we shall never know the full range of such domestic skills. On the other hand fancy basket work, using both whole and split fine sally rods, has probably long been a specialized craft, and has clung to certain districts such as the shores of Lough Neagh and the Suir Valley. As in these areas so all around the coasts of the island it is a craft which accompanies fishing skills. The long-line fishermen of the sea coasts have traditionally made their own line and fish baskets, but it is only inland communities such as those mentioned who have become commercial basket-makers, possibly because their fishing was more seasonal than that of the sea folk. Their products are now mainly baskets for carrying potatoes or turf (Fig. 71). In a special class are the large creels and carrying baskets made of hazel or black sally which were generally employed for farm transport before wheeled carts were adopted. In many districts these were made by itinerant creel-makers who were held in very low esteem, next above the hackler and the tinker. The method of construction, in which the standard rods are stuck upright in the ground, stamps the craft as being of

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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285 415 ancient origin. We shall see that it is the way the Boyne curraghs are built, and it is said that the African pygmies make their carrying baskets in similar fashion. For lightness and to facilitate lifting one or more rows of open 'windows' are left in the sides of the creels. Those used for seaweed were sometimes quite open in construction, and like the manure pots they were generally fitted with hinged bottoms for unloading (Fig. 56).

301 524 285 [832] Besides their utilitarian uses, rushes, grasses and straw have long been playthings for young folk who fashion out of them, for love or for luck, many varieties of decorations and emblems. We describe the Briget's Crosses elsewhere (Fig. 85). Harvest knots, twisted out of the ripe straw of harvest, seem formerly to have been in truth love tokens, though now worn merely as buttonholes for the harvest fair (Plate 13). As one might expect, the girls' knots were the more ornate and they differed from those worn by the boys in having the ears left attached. Some exceptionally fine specimens are fashioned out of flax or fine wild grasses. Star-shaped emblems in these materials are also made (Fig. 70). More complicated knots have four or six strand work, but the ordinary knots are in two ply, made by bending the straws sharply over each other at right angles. Before being knotted they make tolerably strong cords: I have experimented with these on unbaked clay pots and find that when impressed in the soft clay they make very good imitations of the 'cord impressions' seen on Bronze Age pottery. I have heard that in Nigeria the same two-ply technique is employed in making roulettes, from the fibres of the wine palm, for decorating the native pottery. Among the many toys and playthings made of rushes we find baskets for wild strawberries and blaeberries, rattles, butterfly cages, fishing nets, caps, bracelets, belts, hatbands, mock-ceremonial whips, canes and swords and imitation birds' feet and flowers, some of which are shown in Fig. 70. Many of them are associated with particular [517] occasions of the year, for example the imitation flowers with Easter and the blaeberry baskets with Garland Sunday (Chapter XIX) but in general they are the products of the infinite leisure of long summer days of cattle-tending in field, bog or mountain. Probably a number of these objects once had a practical value

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Fig. 70. Rush, grass and straw-work. (1) Cuckoo pint made of rushes, Co. Armagh. (2) Butterfly cage of rushes, Co. Down. (3) Rush bracelet in nine-strand plait, Co. Armagh. (4) 'Hen's claw' of grass, Co. Mayo. (5) 'Briget's rag' of oat straw. Tory Island charm. (6) 'Harvest star' of flax, Co. Antrim. (7) Rush rattle, Co. Mayo. (8) Blaeberry basket of rushes, Co. Down. (9) Harvest knot of flax, Co. Armagh.

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and others were ceremonial; some may be no more than simple pastimes prompted by fancy. Rush baskets were in fact made until recently in some of the Hebridean islands for carrying the fishermen's bait and for holding fish. Baskets of birch twigs, dock stems, ragwort and thistles have also been recorded, and it should be recalled that several examples of grass, sedge, and even moss, made in a similar cross-twisted technique have been recorded from Bronze Age burials in Scotland. The cone-shaped hat of rushes or straw made by children (Fig. 86) recalls in shape at least the traditional headdress of the leprechauns, and it may be noticed that tall steeple hats and helmets seem to have been popular among the Irish down to the seventeenth century.[1] In Co. Kerry the rush hats are worn in mock fights and seem to be regarded as helmets.

Of all these rush toys, none is stranger than the butterfly cage (Fig. 70) which is deftly made by bending long rushes, held upright between the fingers, over others placed transversely. One side of the cage may be left open and a dock leaf inserted as a door. The ends of the rushes are bound together to make a handle. This pastoral plaything can be paralleled in many parts of the world: in the cages in which Spanish shepherd boys carry insects, in the little baskets of dried grass which the Indian herd children make for grasshoppers, in the locust traps which Greek boys, Theocritus tells us, used to weave out of asphodel stalks, and even among the nomads of the Gobi Desert, where, when the cicada begins to call in the great heat, 'every child cuts the desert grass to make a tiny cage to hold one of the fascinating tree-hoppers . . . The Gobi baby's rattle, too, is a hollow ball of twisted grass enclosing a large bead.'[2] The Irish rush rattle is provided with two hazel nuts. Some of the leaves and bracelets are plaited with four, six, nine, or even twelve strands, and a nine strand plait is also seen in one variety of three-cornered Briget's Cross (Fig. 85, 3; Pl. 19, 7).

The conical straw masks and the capes worn by strawboys (Chapter XX, Fig. 88) stripped of their gay ribbons, have been compared with the straw dresses of peasants in Spain or China, and, no doubt, they had their practical prototypes in Ireland.

[1] H. F. McClintock, *Old Irish and Highland Dress*, 88.
[2] M. Cable and F. French, *The Gobi Desert*, 100.

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The straw cape placed over the bee-skep (Fig. 69) is a humble relation. Straw masks are worn also by Biddy Boys on St. Briget's Eve, and by the Christmas Rhymers. On St. Briget's Eve, too, a small straw doll (Brideóg) was dressed up and carried from door to door in the south-west of Ireland. A charm of plaited straw known as Bratóg Brighde (literally, Briget's Rag) is carried by the fishermen of Tory Island as a protection against storms (Fig. 70, 5). There was also Briget's Girdle, a two-strand straw rope, a circle with crosses attached, which was passed over the body as a protective charm, by inserting one leg and then pushing the head through on the Saints' Feast Day (Fig. 85).

Before the Irish live-cattle trade developed there had been for some centuries a great export of hides and skins, and if one goes back earlier it becomes clear that these products must have found a multitude of uses about the farm. For a number of purposes where toughness and durability are specially needed animal skin has remained a traditional material, and in old-fashioned mountainy areas the countryman makes a habit of curing the skins of wild and domesticated animals on the principle that 'you never know but what they'll come in useful'. On analogy with the Hebrides, with which Donegal in particular shows close cultural affinities, skin mealbags should have had a place in cottage economy in north Ireland. When grinding corn, a skin was laid on the floor under the quern to catch the meal. Seal skin served many purposes, from plough traces, in Harris, to the covers of curraghs in Donegal. We have descriptions of cured sheepskins serving as windows,[1] and (from St. Kilda) of fowling ropes bound with strips of salted cowhide to prevent them from being cut by the rocks.[2] But it is in the skin tray, the wecht or wight, that one is most likely to see tradition maintained (Fig. 71). The well-scraped skin of sheep, or sometimes of goat, is stitched on to a rim of ash, bog fir or, in the naked islands which have exhausted even their bog timber, a ring of sugan. To secure the skin free of wrinkles is skilled work, and the finished product is not unlike a tambourine: in fact, it closely resembles the Eskimo caribou drum. Irish wrenboys

[1] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 25.
[2] Martin Martin, *The Western Isles*, 315.

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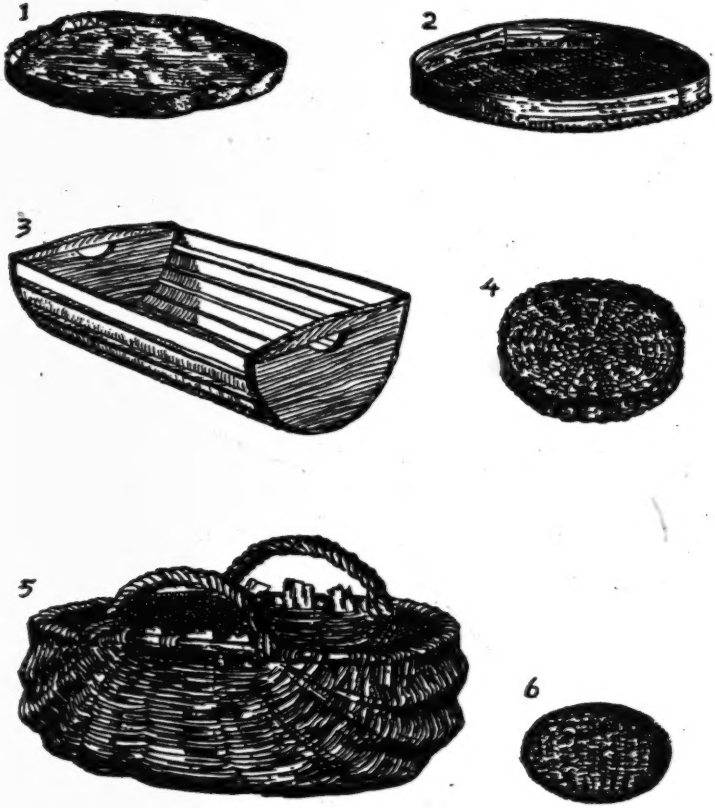

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FIG. 71. Skin-tray, split-ash riddle and potato baskets. Approximate scale 1/9 (No. 5, 1/6). (1) Sheep-skin tray or wight. (2) Split-ash riddle. (3) Potato 'basket'. (4) Potato skib. (5) Potato basket. (6) Potato skib. (All Co. Antrim.)

Irish wren boys

[534] carried a skin tambourine which they beat when hunting the wren on St. Stephen's Day, and one wonders whether the drummers from whom the Orange performers on King William's Day inherit their wild rhythms were trained on ceremonial wights. (There are also sieves, riddles and shallow baskets of split ash or sally, but these, for example the flat round potato skib—a communal self-service plate—should properly be classed as the work of specialists. 212 (Fig. 71).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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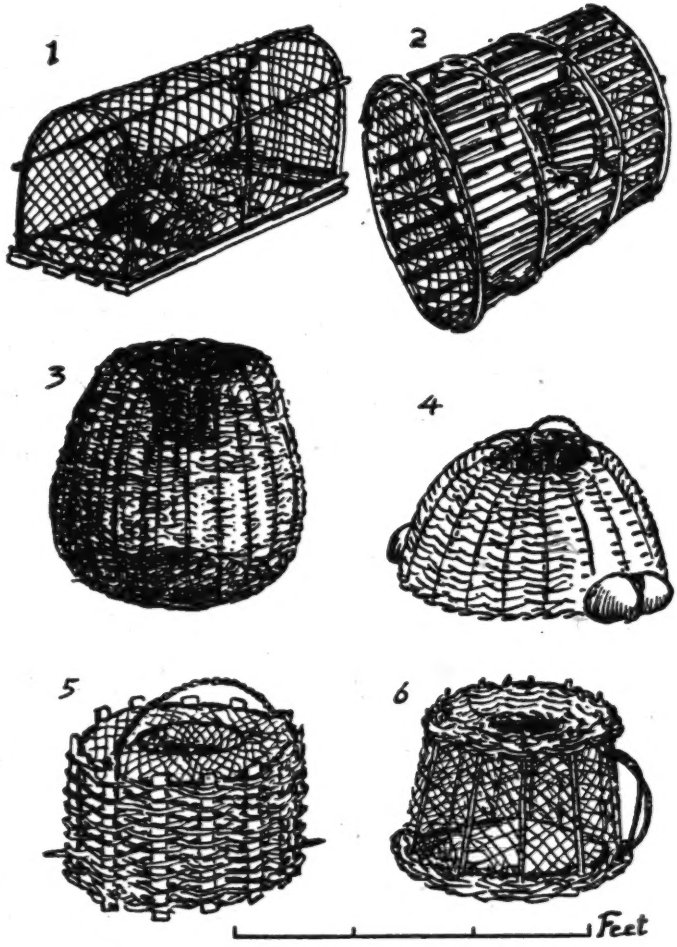

FIG. 76. Creels and pots. (1) Lobster, Co. Antrim. (2) Crayfish, French pattern south and west coasts. (3) Lobster, Co. Mayo. (4) Crab, Co. Antrim. (5) Buckies Co. Down. (6) Crab, Co. Down.

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and are therefore known as 'harvest herrings'. It is then that the yawls or skiffs which lie half hidden for most of the year have their brief spell of activity, and the farmers who jointly own them find on moonlight nights a cool relief from the hot pressure of harvest. The fish are caught in trammel nets, and they were formerly in great demand not only locally but for many miles inland for salting down as winter 'kitchen'.[1] A more varied diet has lessened the demand, for the great days of the salt herring were the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when a potato diet cried out for a tasty accompaniment. On the north-west coast the herring fishery extends through the winter, with consequent serious risks which the Donegal men have none the less been willing to take. Here, perhaps, is one explanation for the survival of the light rowing curragh down to the coming of powered vessels, for a small sail boat brings many hazards on this stormy Atlantic coast.

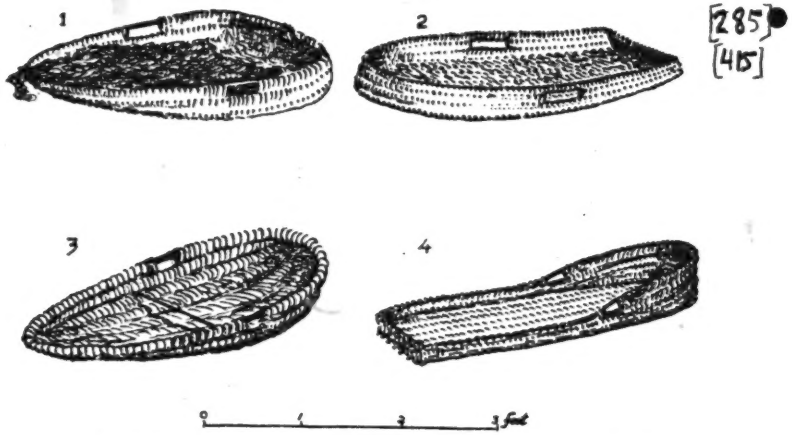

FIG. 82. Long-line baskets. (1) Co. Antrim. (2) Co. Galway. (3) Co. Down. (4) Aran Islands.

Long line fishing for cod, skate, ling and other big fish is almost certainly far older than the herring fishery, and it has preserved down to our own day many ancient practices and

[1] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, ch. 18.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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types of gear. It used to be said that you should never risk taking a dog into some of the fishing villages on the north coast: their skins were in great demand for making the line floats or 'stookies'. Very probably seal skins were formerly used for this purpose, as among the Eskimo. The sinkers of grooved stones from the beach might well pass for prehistoric implements (Fig. 74). The beautifully made line-baskets of unpeeled willow have the graceful curves that one associates with the work of untouched 'primitives' (Fig. 82). And the division of labour was on a primitive level, for to the womenfolk fell the tedious labour of baiting and preparing the hooks. The long-line fishermen were exceptionally hardy and were regarded with awe and respect by the inshore fishermen-farmers. No doubt the timid and the weakly had been weeded out by continual stress. Their knowledge of the sea and of the fishing marks was a guarded secret, and the best banks were sometimes allotted, no doubt to avoid fights, by casting lots. In the Hebrides this was done on Bride's Day. There also, and possibly in Ireland, the banks were held in rotation in a kind of marine rundale.

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527 782 the Feast of St. Martín on 11th November. On St. Martin's Eve the blood of a farm animal or fowl was spilled and sprinkled in the corners of the house, on the door-posts and windows, and in the byre and stable. In some areas the blood was also used to make the mark of a cross on the forehead of each member of the household. The flesh was eaten on St. Martin's Day, which is by tradition one of the feast days on which flesh meat is taken.

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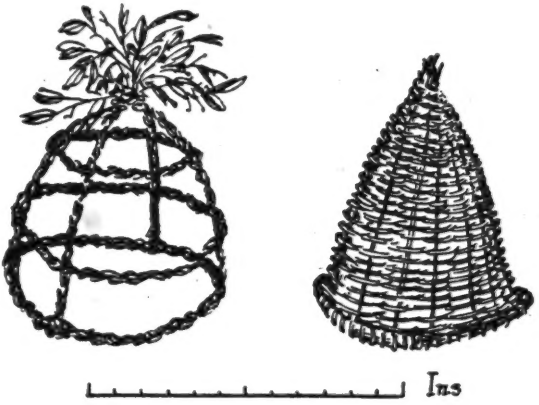

FIG. 86. Hallowe'en caps. *Left:* of plaited straw, Co. Down. *Right:* of woven rushes, Co. Kerry.

We recall that in Scotland a mart was an animal killed at Martinmas to be salted down as winter food, and it may well be that this very practical custom grew out of the cult, which was intended 'to exclude evil spirits for the year'.[1] It seems that seabirds were sometimes killed for the occasion, and there are many superstitions relating to the ill luck which attended anyone who went fishing at Martinmas. Wheel-turning of any kind, whether on cart, mill or spinning wheel, was prohibited. These sacrificial offerings and tabus must be of great antiquity and relate to the preparations for winter. St. Martin's Summer was regarded as the last spell of fine weather before the gales began in earnest. There are hints in folklore that ailing children were

[1] I. Weld, *Roscommon*, 559.